HOMEARAMA welcomes idea shoppers

A baker's dozen of new model homes clustered together will be open for public tour Thursday, Sept. 19, through Sunday, Oct. 6, when HOMEARAMA returns after an eight-year break.

The Building Industry Association of Southeastern Michigan and Standard Federal Bank are primary sponsors of the show at Cornerstone Village Subdivision, Card Road just south of 22 Mile Road in Macomb Township.

"The 13 homes are perfect browsing grounds for prospective homes buyers or those just idea shopping," said Dan MacLeish, president of the BIA and MacLeish Building in Troy.

HOMEARAMA is an open house of individually designed, built, decorated, furnished and landscaped homes incorporating the latest features in style, living convenience and construction.

HOMEARAMA Macomb includes homes by six builders ranging in size from 2,600 to 3,180 square feet and price from $245,900 to $430,000.

MacLeish advises prospective buyers and decorators to come early and wear good walking shoes to tour the homes.

Showgoers may photograph the new ideas and treatments of colors, wall and window coverings, light fixtures, kitchen arrangements, baths, decks, landscaping and other features they find interesting.

Show hours are 2-9 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturdays and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays.

Admission is $7, free for children 12 and under. Free parking is provided and refreshments will be available for purchase.

BIA also will sponsor HOMEARAMA Orion Thursday, Oct. 17, through Sunday, Nov. 3, in the Turnberry Subdivision at Indianwood Golf & Country Club. That site is on Indianwood Road between Joslyn and Baldwin in Orion Township.

Make top-notch connections when updating electric wiring

BY JAMES AND MORRIS CAREY
FOR AP WEEKLY FEATURES

As remodeling contractors we've often peeked inside the wall cavities of homes – old and new. Some of the older ones date back to when electrical wiring first was installed. What a joy to see how it was once done, how it now is done, and to be able to compare them. It is intriguing to witness changes over the years, as researchers, manufacturers, tradespersons and lawmakers have combined to do things more safely and sensibly. They really don't build them like they used to – they build them *much better now.*

Electric wiring has always been mostly copper. Other metals have been tried, but copper seems to work best. It is reasonably soft, making it easy to bend around corners, and it conducts electricity well. The antique wire that we've seen installed was almost all copper – pretty much the same copper that is being used today; but there are other major differences. The diameter of the copper, the distance that it is allowed to travel in a circuit, fuse size, how much load a given circuit is allowed to carry, grounding, sheathing quality (which insulates against shorts) and other factors have drastically improved performance and safety of electrical circuitry.

There are stringent regulations about how many wires can be in an electrical junction box. The relationship has to do with the amount of air space that is needed for a given number of wire connections to properly cool. Or, the amount of air space needed to prevent a given number of wires from overheating and causing a fire.

When you go looking for a length of wire in the electrical department of your local hardware store you might see the term "nonmetallic cable." It's not nonmetallic wire. It refers to the casing or sheathing. That's right, some wire comes in a metal casing and some have a plastic or rubber nonmetallic (NM) casing. NM cable is the most common kind of electric cable used in homes. In one city where we worked, homes are required to be wired with metallic cable. Check with your building department before you begin any wiring. Also, be sure that the casing material that surrounds the wire is approved by the building code. The casing description or "code" will be on the box. "THHN," for example, specifies the type of casing that covers the wire. We have been in *stores that had wire for sale that* was illegal (and unsafe) to install in a home.

When thermo-coupled recessed light fixtures became mandatory, we witnessed stores selling the old-fashioned and outdated (and illegal) kind by the case. That's probably because they weren't illegal to sell – only illegal to install. Makes you wonder how many unwary consumers were duped by dopey clerks and money-hungry proprietors.

PREPARING CABLE

It also is important to know how to properly prepare the end of an electric cable so that a top-notch connection can be made. There are several steps:

- Strip the outside casing
- Remove the paper wrap
- Strip the individual wire casings
- Expose the correct amount of wire

The outside casing can be removed by pulling a cable stripper along the length of the cable. Be careful here. Some types of encased wire run parallel while others are twisted. Using a cable stripper on a wire housing where twisted wires exist could cut across the individual wire casings into the protective casing beneath. We use a razor knife at its most shallow setting, slowly cutting between the wires below. Next, remove all the paper wrapping back to the same point as the outside casing. One thing you don't want in an electrical box is paper.

Note: Wire nuts are used to make most modern wire connections. It really is important that the end of each wire be squarely cut and straight. It is far more difficult to perform this simple connecting task when the end of the wires to be tied together are not straight and square.

Finally, don't whittle the covering off the individual wires. Instead, use an approved wire stripper. The cutting edge of the stripper is designed to take the covering off the wire without cutting the wire itself. Even the slightest nick in copper wire can cause an eventual break. In that respect, copper wire is like glass. All you have to do to make two pieces is slightly notch the surface. But, with glass that's a good thing.

Cut the casing back about three-quarters of an inch. That's the length that works best with wire nuts – enough exposed wire to make a connection, but not so much that the wire can't be completely covered by the wire nut.

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Domes are for living, too, not just for staging sporting events

It takes a special kind of family to build a home that looks like it's going to launch off into space, but geodesic dome owners seem to be the ones that are getting the last laugh.

(AP) – Dome homes aren't for squares.

It takes a special kind of family to build a home that looks like it's going to launch off into space, but geodesic dome owners seem to be the ones that are getting the last laugh.

Sharon and Chris Evans recently traded in their turn-of-the-century farmhouse in northwest Missouri, complete with walnut banisters and oak floors for a geodesic dome that took two days to erect.

"Chris and I looked at (geodesic domes) for years," says Sharon Evans, an elementary school guidance counselor. "We bought our first dome book in the '70s."

The Evanses were looking for a unique place to live for many years. They started out by looking into buying a log home, but they found that they were too expensive per square foot.

Square footage is important to the Evanses, considering that they have five children, two daughters-in-law and three grandchildren. Although only two of their children still live at home with them, they need plenty of room.

Chris Evans, who's currently running for a statewide office, ended the family's search for the perfect home, when he found an article in a Popular Mechanics magazine that mentioned geodesic domes in the Arctic.

The article talked about the dome's energy efficiency and structural strength against the elements.

"They were starting to become en vogue, a unique method of housing," he said. "And we looked at them ever since."

A little over a year ago, the Evanses made the final decision to build a geodesic dome home amid 85 acres of property in a secluded country setting. After picking a dome company, they started working on floor plans.

Footings were poured in January, and on two days in early April, 12 of their closest friends and relatives and a site supervisor contracted through their dome company, helped build the home.

The basic foundation of a geodesic dome can easily be set up. The homebuilder picks a design and decides on a company, which then sends out a kit that usually includes a dome shell, dome extensions, triangular skylights, blueprints and specialized dome hardware.

It's up to the dome builder to finish the dome themselves or contract someone to do it.

Chris Evans says a dome can cost about 35 percent less in materials and construction than a conventional home of comparable size, if you hire the right people to help finish it. If you do it yourself, overall costs decrease by 50 to 65 percent, he says.

"Finishing the dome is time-consuming and difficult," Sharon Evans says.

And it's not for everyone.

"I like it; it's different," says Ryan, the Evanse" 24-year-old son. "I'd never want to live in one, though. The rooms are weird."

Harold and Carole Johnson, who live nearby, have become very comfortable with their geodesic home over the years.

"I like the energy efficiency and practicality of it," says Harold Johnson, an insurance agent. "And it's somewhat unique."

The Johnsons built their dome in 1983. It is 42 feet in diameter, 19 feet tall and has 2,000 square feet of usable space.

In the late '70s, the Johnson's were concerned, like many people, that energy prices were on the rise. They wanted to build a home that would be energy efficient and unique. Initially, they considered an underground home, but the land they owned wasn't not suited for it.

"We decided that (geodesic domes) were the most efficient structure that we had run across," Harold Johnson said.

Like the Evanses, the Johnsons ordered a dome kit and put up their home in two days with the help of their two sons, friends and family.

"In many respects our dome is pretty conventional inside," says Carole Johnson. "Some are more open, but ours is more divided because we knew we were going to have two teenage sons that were going to need their privacy."

According to domehomes.com, the cost of a basic dome is anywhere from $35 to $48 per square foot. This adds up to between $70,000 and $96,000 for a basic 2,000 square-foot dome. Any additional costs for finishing the dome depend on the owner's preferences.

On average, the Johnsons usually pay no more than $100 a month for gas and electricity.

"Our bills have been consistently reasonable," he says.